

MERIT—Frequently Asked Questions

*What early care & education and school-age professionals need to know about
the Managed Education and Registry Information Tool*



WASHINGTON STATE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM

CREATING PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS

www.del.wa.gov/requirements/professional/

1. What is MERIT?

The Managed Education and Registry Information Tool (MERIT) is a voluntary, statewide tool to document and recognize the professional achievements of early care & education and school-age professionals. This innovative online tool helps professionals find training opportunities, access information on career pathways, and track their individual career progress. MERIT also identifies approved trainers who provide education to professionals. Over time, MERIT will also be used for:

- Quality assurance and requirements for trainers and trainings to ensure that the workforce is receiving high-quality training that is linked to the state Core Competencies and Early Learning Guidelines.
- Placement of individuals on a level of a career lattice based on verified training and education accomplishments.
- Assisting DEL child care licensing staff in ensuring that state requirements for individuals and facilities are met.
- Data collection on the early care & education and school-age workforce in order to identify trends and inform decision-making related to policy and investments.

2. Who can join MERIT?

MERIT is designed as a tool for all those who work with young children and their families in an early care & education or school-age program. This includes licensed child care professionals in family home and center-based care, Head Start professionals, Early Care and Education Assistance Program (ECEAP) professionals, preschool teachers, school-age professionals and administrators who support the direct care of children.

3. What are the benefits of joining MERIT?

MERIT is an efficient system to keep track of your ongoing education and training. In addition, professionals can use it as a tool to share qualifications with current and future employers. Trend data that is confidentially collected in MERIT will help the state identify gaps and patterns on a regional and state level. This information can then be used to raise awareness of the workforce issues that impact early care & education and school-age programs. This information is vital to encouraging increased recognition and compensation for knowledgeable and experienced professionals.

Participation in MERIT will help you to:

- Verify and document the education and training experiences that you have achieved.
- Plan your future education and career goals.
- Use verified qualifications to apply for employment or participate in quality initiatives around the state.
- Count yourself as a professional in early care & education and school-age services in Washington.

4. What does MERIT do for the field of early childhood education?

DEL is working to increase the quality of early care & education and school-age programs around the state. Quality is directly related to a knowledgeable and skilled workforce and MERIT emphasizes the significance of this profession in children and family's lives. MERIT provides information on career pathways for continued growth and a formalized system to recognize professional development.

5. What information was transferred from the STARS database to MERIT?

If you were registered with the STARS database, some of the information was transferred to MERIT, including your STARS ID and your training history.

Other information was not transferred from the STARS database. This was to ensure that only current and accurate information is listed in MERIT. You must register in MERIT using your previous STARS ID to update your professional record and apply for a review of your educational qualifications (see question 8). Adding verified education information to your professional record will provide evidence of your successful achievements for employment opportunities and initiatives that have education-based requirements. Requirements for STARS training have not changed and will now be verified and listed in MERIT.

6. How can I register with MERIT?

Visit the MERIT webpage at <https://apps.del.wa.gov/merit>

For help with setting up your professional record, please use the MERIT quick steps guide available on MERIT.

7. How do I remain current once I have a MERIT record?

Your MERIT record is active for one year from the date you register. Each year, MERIT will send email notification prior to your renewal date. You must update your MERIT record, including any changes in employment, contact information, and confidential workforce data, to remain active. MERIT will send confirmation of your updated status once you complete the record update.

8. How is my education verified and approved through MERIT?

You can apply to have your educational qualifications reviewed and added to your MERIT record. Adding educational information to your record can serve as a professional resume tool for current and future employment opportunities. Additionally, educational qualifications are often a requirement to participate in local or state initiatives and education that is verified in MERIT will provide evidence of your accomplishments. Go to the MERIT homepage, sign-in and click on the applications tab. Once you complete the appropriate application, MERIT will alert you to the required documents that must be sent to DEL for a review of your qualifications. Once an application is verified and approved, it will automatically show on your MERIT record.

9. What if I earned my degree in another country?

Professionals who hold degree(s) granted outside of the United States must have transcripts evaluated to determine U.S. equivalency. There are many agencies around the nation that offer this service. A copy of the translated transcripts and/or a letter or statement of equivalency must be submitted in order for the information to be verified and become a permanent part of your professional record in MERIT.

To find an agency that provides evaluation and translation services, visit the National Association of Credential Evaluation Services website at www.naces.org

10. How can I find training in MERIT?

Visit the MERIT homepage and click on the "Find a Training" link or the "Search MERIT" tab. You can search for training by training date, location, age group focus, training delivery method, or trainer.

11. How is training added to my MERIT profile?

When you attend a training offered by a state-approved trainer, the trainer will record all information in MERIT. It is the trainer's responsibility to determine which training participants have met all requirements for the training and will enter this information directly into MERIT. It is the individual professional's responsibility to provide the trainer with a valid STARS ID. Once a trainer completes the required information on all participants who attend and pass the training, it will be automatically added to participants' individual MERIT records.

12. Is there financial assistance to help with the cost of training?

STARS scholarships are administered in a partnership between DEL and the Washington Association for the Education of Young Children (WAEYC). Eligible individuals may receive a one-time award of \$150 toward basic (20-hour) STARS training, and up to \$100 each year toward continuing education (annual requirement of 10 hours). Find the form on the WAEYC website: www.waeyc.org/STARS.htm.

13. What are the Core Competencies?

There are two sets of Core Competencies; one written for early care and education professionals and one written for school-age professionals. The Core Competencies include standards around content areas with five levels in each area that a professional can achieve. You can find them on DEL's website at www.del.wa.gov/requirements/professional

The Core Competencies:

- Define what professionals need to know and be able to do to provide quality education and care
- Serve as the foundation for decisions and practices carried out by professionals in all settings and programs
- Establish a set of standards for care and education to support professionalism in the field and will help to align all state required trainings tracked in MERIT
- Are a resource tool that can be used by many people for many purposes:

- Providers, practitioners and teachers: to assess knowledge and identify areas for future professional development
- Directors/administrators: to define training and education requirements for job descriptions, help employees with goal setting and establish a salary scale based on educational achievement
- Trainers/training organizations: to plan and organize training opportunities
- Higher education: to coordinate and design courses and organize the framework for credentials, certificates and degrees.

14. What do I do if I don't have access to a computer or the Internet?

We encourage all professionals to complete MERIT records and applications online. If you do not have access to a computer, contact your local library or child care resource & referral agency to find out more about public computer usage. If you are not familiar with computer technology, you can register in MERIT, complete a MERIT record and apply for any MERIT application through a paper process. Call the MERIT office to request that forms be mailed to you.

15. Can I get STARS credit for taking training from a non-state-approved trainer?

You may complete no more than 3 of the total 10 hours of continuing education required per year by a non-state-approved trainer. This includes college coursework that is taken outside of the early childhood department or other training that is not given by a state-approved trainer. Training can only count towards the training requirements for the year in which it was completed. Training by a non-state-approved trainer must be reviewed and approved by DEL in order to add it to your professional record. Submit a request by completing a continuing education proposal application online in MERIT and following the instructions for providing the proper supporting documents.

16. What do I do if I disagree with a decision on a MERIT application?

DEL takes all appeals and concerns seriously and all appeals are handled in a confidential manner. The following items can be appealed if a professional is not satisfied with the decisions provided by the registry:

- Education application decision
- Educational exemption decision
- Continuing education proposal decision
- Denial of trainer application or assigned trainer level
- Denial of training
- Highest level of position noted on education application

The MERIT appeal process is as follows:

- A. Individual completes and submits the MERIT Appeal Form to the Registry explaining their case and including any additional, necessary documentation to review the appeal. The appeal must be received within 60 days of processing the original application.
- B. The appeal is initially reviewed by the verification team that first processed the application. If there are determined to be no errors in processing, the DEL Professional Development Administrator reviews the appeal and may request additional supporting documentation. The Professional Development Administrator makes an initial decision within 10 business days of receiving all documents necessary to make a determination, and sends written notification to the individual. If the individual does not accept the initial decision, the Professional Development Administrator summarizes the appeal and submits to the DEL Director of Outcomes and Accountability for review within 10 business days.
- C. DEL notifies the individual of the final decision in writing. If granted, appropriate processing is automatically completed within MERIT. If denied, the individual is notified in writing of the decision including information on why the appeal was denied and the actions he/she would need to take to fulfill their request.

17. What do I do if I have a concern about a STARS approved trainer?

DEL takes all concerns seriously and all reports of unethical or unprofessional behavior are handled in a confidential manner. Please complete and submit the Trainer Concern Form and include any additional documentation to clarify your concern. The form is reviewed by the DEL Professional Development Administrator who may contact you with questions or request additional information. DEL reviews all trainers on an ongoing basis and requires a renewal of trainer status every three years.

18. What security protects my information in MERIT?

MERIT is owned and operated by DEL. DEL has a fully implemented security policy which addresses all applicable standards outlined in the ISB IT Security Standards. DEL has taken a strategic approach to authentication and authorization that is consistent with current internet standards. By using SSL and data access security standards the potential of improper viewing of confidential information is mitigated.

19. If I have further questions, who can I contact?

Department of Early Learning
Attn: MERIT
PO Box 40970
Olympia, WA 98504-0970

Email: merit@del.wa.gov
Phone: 1-866-482-4325, option 8
Fax: 1-360-413-3482